



TESTIMONY
of the
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
to the
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

February 17, 2010 - (R)

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 90% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony to you on issues of concern to towns and cities.

CCM opposes House Bill 5033 "An Act Requiring the Installation and Use of Seat Belts on School Buses" which would mandate that all school buses be equipped with seat safety belts by January 1, 2010.

While CCM is sympathetic to the reason behind this legislation, if enacted it would create yet another large unfunded state mandate on towns and cities without a proven increase in child safety. As we discuss this bill towns and cities have already suffered a \$100 million cut in state aid in this biennium; the State is currently facing a \$500-\$700 million deficit; and upwards of \$3 billion deficits in the out years. In this context the State should not even consider any new unfunded mandates on local governments – especially one with such staggering costs and unproven benefits.

Costs Will Be High

- According to a 2007 Congressional Research Service Report, *Seat Belts on School Buses: Overview of the Issue*, it is estimated that a new school bus costs \$75,000 and the installation of the 3-point safety seat belts would be an additional \$8,000-\$15,000 per bus. The Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA) has estimated that in today's dollars these costs could be up to \$20,000 to outfit a new school bus and \$35,000 to retrofit an existing bus. CCM has polled municipalities to determine the number of Type I buses owned or contracted for, so far 98 municipalities have responded. Based on the estimated installation cost figures cited above **HB 5033 could cost between \$187 million and \$436 million statewide** just to address the buses currently in the system. (see attached spreadsheet for an estimated cost to each town represented on the Transportation Committee).

Other Concerns

Aside from the cost of retrofitting the buses, there are other equally concerning issues posed by this proposal, among other things:

- Three-point harness belts would diminish capacity of the buses by one-third, reducing seats from a three-student capacity to one - *how many more buses will municipalities have to purchase (at a cost of around \$100,000 per bus) or lease in order to accommodate all of the students they are required to?*

- Three-point harness belts must be adjusted appropriately to the size of the user in order for the belts to not only provide protection but also not cause injury - who will be responsible for making sure each and every child is appropriately fitted?
- How will the use of the safety belts be enforced? Will school districts have to employ monitors for the school buses?
- There are also safety concerns with the potential for the belts to be used other than as designed (e.g. as weapons, for illegal restraint, or other such purposes).
- Who will help release young students from the belts in case of a need to evacuate the bus?

No Proof Of Increased Safety

Two well-respected national organizations - The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services and the National Association of School Transportation – have both indicated that the installation of safety belts does not increase the safety and protection of the individuals riding on the bus. Buses are already designed with significantly safety measures – roll bars throughout the roof system; compartmentalized seating with high backs and narrow aisles to contain riders to reduce impact of any side contact to name a few.

According to a 2002 study, *Special Report 269: The Relative Risks of School Travel*, conducted by the Transportation Research Board (TRB), school buses are the safest mode of school transportation and on average 790 out of 815 (98%) school-aged children deaths in motor vehicle crashes during school travel hours occurred in passenger vehicles or to walkers, bicyclists or motorcyclists, more than half occurring to occupants of vehicles driven by teenagers. **Further, the TRB study concluded that traveling to school by school bus is second only to commercial bus travel in passenger safety. In addition, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration has cited that the overall “school bus occupant fatality rate...is more than six times lower than the overall rate for motor vehicles.”**

Summary

According to OLR Report 2009-R-0419, currently there are only “six states – California, Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York and Texas – that require seat belts on school buses. However, the Louisiana and Texas laws do not take effect until those states obtain adequate funding.”

In the current fiscal climate, municipalities are already struggling to stay afloat – services have been cut, employees laid off, positions frozen, and local property-taxes increased. While well intentioned, this proposal will serve only to provide a false sense of security of increased safety at an enormous statewide expense.

CCM urges the Committee to take no action on this bill.

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If you have any questions, please contact Donna Hamzy, Legislative Associate
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THE VOICE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TOWNS REPRESENTED BY THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
Estimated Cost (by town): Installation of 3-Point Safety Seat Belts On School Buses

Municipality	# of Buses	Type I Buses (\$15k)*	Type I Buses (\$20k)**	Type I Buses (\$35k)***
Berlin	20	\$ 300,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 700,000
Bethel	25	\$ 375,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 875,000
Bolton	10	\$ 150,000	\$ 200,000	\$ 350,000
Bridgeport	114	\$ 1,710,000	\$ 2,280,000	\$ 3,990,000
Bristol	92	\$ 1,380,000	\$ 1,840,000	\$ 3,220,000
Brookfield	28	\$ 420,000	\$ 560,000	\$ 980,000
Danbury	67	\$ 1,005,000	\$ 1,340,000	\$ 2,345,000
Darien	22	\$ 330,000	\$ 440,000	\$ 770,000
East Hartford	80	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 1,600,000	\$ 2,800,000
East Lyme	22	\$ 330,000	\$ 440,000	\$ 770,000
East Windsor	14	\$ 210,000	\$ 280,000	\$ 490,000
Ellington	23	\$ 345,000	\$ 460,000	\$ 805,000
Fairfield	123	\$ 1,845,000	\$ 2,460,000	\$ 4,305,000
Farmington	44	\$ 660,000	\$ 880,000	\$ 1,540,000
Glastonbury	61	\$ 915,000	\$ 1,220,000	\$ 2,135,000
Greenwich	69	\$ 1,035,000	\$ 1,380,000	\$ 2,415,000
Griswold	21	\$ 315,000	\$ 420,000	\$ 735,000
Harwinton	9	\$ 135,000	\$ 180,000	\$ 315,000
Hebron	19	\$ 285,000	\$ 380,000	\$ 665,000
Lisbon	11	\$ 165,000	\$ 220,000	\$ 385,000
Marlborough	10	\$ 150,000	\$ 200,000	\$ 350,000
Middletown	60	\$ 900,000	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 2,100,000
New Britain	78	\$ 1,170,000	\$ 1,560,000	\$ 2,730,000
New Canaan	60	\$ 900,000	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 2,100,000
New Fairfield	25	\$ 375,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 875,000
North Haven	27	\$ 405,000	\$ 540,000	\$ 945,000
Norwalk	54	\$ 810,000	\$ 1,080,000	\$ 1,890,000
Plainfield	50	\$ 750,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,750,000
Plainville	13	\$ 195,000	\$ 260,000	\$ 455,000
Plymouth	51	\$ 765,000	\$ 1,020,000	\$ 1,785,000
Redding	16	\$ 240,000	\$ 320,000	\$ 560,000
Ridgefield	40	\$ 600,000	\$ 800,000	\$ 1,400,000
Rocky Hill	18	\$ 270,000	\$ 360,000	\$ 630,000
Salem	9	\$ 135,000	\$ 180,000	\$ 315,000
Sherman	7	\$ 105,000	\$ 140,000	\$ 245,000

Municipality	# of Buses	\$15k*	\$20k**	\$35k***
Southington	35	\$ 525,000	\$ 700,000	\$ 1,225,000
Stamford	168	\$ 2,520,000	\$ 3,360,000	\$ 5,880,000
Trumbull	70	\$ 1,050,000	\$ 1,400,000	\$ 2,450,000
Vernon	20	\$ 300,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 700,000
Voluntown	6	\$ 90,000	\$ 120,000	\$ 210,000
West Hartford	55	\$ 825,000	\$ 1,100,000	\$ 1,925,000
Weston	20	\$ 300,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 700,000
Westport	38	\$ 570,000	\$ 760,000	\$ 1,330,000
Wethersfield	36	\$ 540,000	\$ 720,000	\$ 1,260,000
Wilton	38	\$ 570,000	\$ 760,000	\$ 1,330,000
Windsor	45	\$ 675,000	\$ 900,000	\$ 1,575,000
Windsor Locks	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wolcott	36	\$ 540,000	\$ 720,000	\$ 1,260,000
TOTALS	1990	\$ 29,850,000	\$ 39,800,000	\$ 69,650,000

* Estimated cost to install 3-point safety seat belts on type I school buses according to a 2007 Congressional Research Service Report, "Seat Belts on School Buses: Overview of the Issue."

** Estimated cost to install 3-point safety seat belts on new type I school buses according to The Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA).

*** Estimated cost to retrofit existing type I school buses with 3-point safety seat belts according to The Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA).